WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of assessing image quality, comprising:

detecting a target object region in an input image;

generating an image quality feature vector representing the target object region in an image quality feature space; and

mapping the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the target object region corresponds to a human face.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the target object region corresponds to an object relevant to a person's subjective assessment of image quality.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the target object region is detected based on a sub-sampled version of the input image.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the image quality feature vector is generated based on a version of the target object region at a resolution of the input image.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the target object region is detected based o a first set of features of the input image and the image quality feature vector is generated based on a second set of features of the input image different from the first set of features.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the first set of features is substantially decoupled from the second set of features.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one brightness feature describing a respective brightness characteristic of the target object region.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one spectral feature describing a respective spatial frequency characteristic of the target object region.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein generating the image quality feature vector comprises decomposing the target object region into multiple wavelet transform sub-bands.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein each spectral feature describes energy in a respective wavelet transform sub-band.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one noise feature describing a respective noise characteristic of the target object region.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein a noise feature is computed based on a measure of noise in the target object region.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein a noise feature is computed based on a measure of spatial homogeneity of spectral features each describing a respective spatial frequency characteristic of the target image region.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the image quality feature vector is mapped to a measure of image quality in accordance with a machine learning process.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the image quality feature vector is mapped to a measure of image quality in accordance with a radial basis function based machine learning process.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein the image quality feature vector is mapped to a measure of image quality in accordance with a mixture of Gaussian based machine learning process.

18. A system for assessing image quality, comprising:

a target object region detection module operable to detect a target object region in an input image;

a feature extraction module operable to generate an image quality feature vector representing the target object region in an image quality feature space; and

an image quality assessment module operable to map the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality.

19. The system of claim 18, wherein the target object region corresponds to a human face.

20. The system of claim 18, wherein the feature extraction module detects the target object region based on a sub-sampled version of the input image.

21. The system of claim 18, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one brightness feature describing a respective brightness characteristic of the target object region.

22. The system of claim 18, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one spectral feature describing a respective spatial frequency characteristic of the target object region.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the feature extraction module is operable to generate the image quality feature vector by decomposing the target object region into multiple wavelet transform sub-bands.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein each spectral feature describes energy in a respective wavelet transform sub-band.

25. The system of claim 18, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one noise feature describing a respective noise characteristic of the target object region.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the feature extraction module computes a noise feature based on a measure of noise in the target object region.

27. The system of claim 25, wherein the feature extraction module computes a noise feature based on a measure of spatial homogeneity of spectral features each describing a respective spatial frequency characteristic of the target image region.

28. The system of claim 18, wherein the image quality assessment module maps the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality in accordance with a machine learning process.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the image quality assessment module maps the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality in accordance with a radial basis function based machine learning process.

30. The system of claim 28, wherein the image quality assessment module maps the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality in accordance with a mixture of Gaussian based machine learning process.

31. A system for assessing image quality, comprising:

means for detecting a target object region in an input image;

means for generating an image quality feature vector representing the target object region in an image quality feature space; and

means for mapping the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality.

32. A machine-readable medium storing machine-readable instructions for causing a machine to:

detect a target object region in an input image;

generate an image quality feature vector representing the target object region in an image quality feature space; and

map the image quality feature vector to a measure of image quality.

33. A method of generating an image quality assessment engine, comprising:

detecting target object regions in multiple input images;

generating image quality feature vectors representing the target object regions in an image quality feature space;

correlating the image quality feature vectors with respective measures of image quality assigned to the input images; and

computing a mapping between image quality feature vectors and assigned measures of image quality.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the target object region corresponds to a human face.

35. The method of claim 33, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one brightness feature describing a respective brightness characteristic of the target object region.

36. The method of claim 33, wherein the image quality feature space is spanned by multiple features including at least one spectral feature describing a respective spatial frequency characteristic of the target object region.